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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8821
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1868
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5346
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8939
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6515
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4344
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2333
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000193

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MLS DIRECTOR MEETING WITH LABOR MINISTER

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (C) During a March 24 meeting in Nay Pyi Taw during EAP/MLS Director Stephen Blake's five-country familiarization tour, Blake, Charge, and Burmese Minister for Labor and Relations, Major General Aung Kyi, discussed labor issues and relations with Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK). Aung Kyi gave assurance of the GOB's intention to keep cooperating with the International Labor Organization (ILO) on forced labor, citing statistics of progress since 2007. Aung Kyi expressed exasperation over what he claims is ASSK's refusal to meet with him, and rejected Charge's suggestion he should reach out to her again. Echoing the regime's talking points, Aung Kyi asserted the 2010 elections would be "free and fair." Charge and Mr. Blake made the point that for an election to be truly free and fair, ASSK and Burma's other opposition political leaders, now in detention, would need to be able to participate.

Working with the ILO

12. (C) Aung Kyi told Blake and Charge that cooperation with the ILO has been improving since the GOB and ILO entered into a Supplementary Understanding providing for the joint investigation of reported labor-rights violations. Aung Kyi reported that, to date, 81 complaints of labor-rights abuses have been reported to his Ministry by the ILO. Of these, 72 have been "resolved" with the remaining nine still under investigation. The Labor Minister went on to describe labor-rights training conducted jointly by the Ministry of Labor and ILO, and claimed forced labor complaints have declined as a result. Mr. Blake affirmed that the U.S. places a high priority on labor rights and encouraged the Minister to keep working to improve Burma's record on those issues. In particular, Mr. Blake noted insufficient progress has been made on forced labor and urged more attention on that critical problem.

Aung San Suu Kyi

13. (C) Speaking in his role as the regime's "Minister of

Relations," Aung Kyi lamented what he claims is ASSK's refusal to meet with him. Aung Kyi recounted having met with ASSK five times, but complained that she has not responded to his two latest invitations in September 2008. He said their first three meetings went well, there was progress; but in their final two discussions there was divergence, especially after a regime announcement in October 2007 that Senior General Than Shwe would meet with ASSK if she renounces "confrontation, utter devastation, and sanctions." Aung Kyi said that opening had "great potential to solve problems;" but, he complained, unfortunately ASSK responded that she hadn't done any of the acts so she couldn't abandon them. Aung Kyi said it appears ASSK doesn't want to talk with anyone other than Than Shwe.

14. (C) Charge noted reports that ASSK did not respond in September due to poor health at the time, and noted that the NLD had recently issued a statement offering to meet with regime officials "without precondition." In light of this, Charge suggested that the ball is now in the GOB's court and urged Aung Kyi to extend another invitation for talks. Aung Kyi declined, saying that he prefers to wait for ASSK to respond to his invitations from last September.

Elections -----

15. (C) Mr. Blake noted that, despite GOB assurances, the USG and many in the international community remain skeptical the 2010 elections will be truly free and fair with so many

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political prisoners, including ASSK, still behind bars. He urged release of those political prisoners and expressed a hope that reconciliation could commence. Echoing the regime's talking points, Aung Kyi asserted the 2010 elections would be "free and fair" and would result in "genuine" results. Aung Kyi suggested that perhaps the situation would change for the better in the coming months before the elections are held. When asked, Aung Kyi denied having any political ambitions of his own but held out the possibility of a political future "if invited."

Comment -----

16. (C) Major General Aung Kyi's ego was undoubtedly bruised by ASSK's (accurate) observation that he is not a key decision maker. Nonetheless, we reminded him that, as ASSK is under house arrest and he is not, the opportunity to reach out surely is in his hands. His work as Labor Minister is more commendable, although far from perfect. He strikes us as one of the regime's most marketable public faces. Since he fudged a reply about his political future, we would not be surprised if he were to play a role in a "civilian" government after 2010.
DINGER